DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 573 FL 025 772

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TITLE Do Second Language Learners Always Have To Stay on the Receiving End in a Cross-Cultural Exchange?
PUB DATE 1998-10-00
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Conference of the Faculty of Language at the University of Malaysia (3rd, October 20-22, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingualism; *College Students; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; *Language Skills; Second Language Learning; Second Languages; *Self Concept; Self Evaluation (Individuals)
IDENTIFIERS Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

A study examined factors in the hierarchical formation of self-concept in English as a second language among bilingual college students. Subjects were 306 students in a Hong Kong institution of higher education, who were administered an academic self-description questionnaire. Confirmatory factor analysis of the data found distinct self-concepts linked to each of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). It also found that a single global English self-concept can represent those self-concepts, suggesting that self-concept in a subject area is both hierarchical and multidimensional. Self-concepts of the receptive skills (listening, reading) were found to contribute more strongly to formation of the global English self-concept than were the productive language skills (speaking, writing). Implications for instruction and areas for further investigation are discussed. Contains 55 references. (MSE)

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Do Second Language Learners Always Have to Stay on the Receiving End in a Cross-Cultural Exchange?

ED 428 573

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Paper presented at the Third International Conference of Faculty of Language of University of Malaysia, 20-22 October 1998.
Conference Theme: The Role of Langugage in a Borderless World: Harkening to the Voices of Asia

Abstract

This study examined the factors that attributed to the formation of a higher order English self-concept factor of bilingual higher education students. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that a general English self-concept can represent self-concepts in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The students' self-concept of each skill was well-defined and the students could discriminate the four constructs distinctly. Self-concepts of the 'receptive skills' of English reading and listening (β=.86 and .83 respectively) had higher contributions to the higher order English self-concept than the self-concepts of the 'productive skills' of English speaking and English writing (β=.77 for both). That the results showing higher education learners of a second language (L2) are likely to perceive and expect themselves to stay on the receiving end when they are learning or communicating in a second language, playing a comparatively passive role in the exchange has significant implications for L2 learning and teaching

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An understanding of students' academic self-concepts is becoming more and more of a vital concern in educational psychology because self-concept is found to possess a predictive, and in some cases, causal value over other educational outcomes. A growing body of research have unfolded the relationships of academic self-concepts with other forms of educational outcomes. For example, using longitudinal data, Marsh and Yeung (1997a) and Muijs (1997) demonstrated that academic self-concept has substantial effects on subsequent academic achievement and that the effect was reciprocal in manner. Marsh and Yeung (1997b) have also found that academic self-concept may influence choice behavior in coursework. Other studies (e.g., House, 1993) have also demonstrated the relationship of academic self-concept with achievement-related expectancies.

Contrasted to the traditional understanding of self-concept as being a single global composite, Shaveslon, Hubner and Stanton (1976) proposed an empirircally testable self-concept model that is characterised by its multifaceted and hierarchical nature. The Shavelson model posited a general self-concept at the apex of the hierarchy beneath which were academic and nonacademic self-concepts, and each was further divided into self-concepts in various dimensions. Thus, recent research on self-concept has focused on its multidimensional nature. Because of this focus, effective instrumentation that reflects the multidimensionality and domain-specific nature of self-concept is required (Byrne, 1984; Marsh, 1990a, 1993b; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988). Derived from the Shavelson hierarchical model of self-concept, Marsh (1992a, 1992b, 1992c) designed and administered a series of age-relevant Self Description Questionnaires (SDQI, II, III) and an Academic Self-Description Questionnaire ASDQ (Marsh, 1990b). The ASDQ, which is adopted in the present study, was designed to measure the multidimensional academic self-concepts of students. The validity of these SDQ instruments has been strongly supported and accredited by recent research (e.g., Byrne 1996; Byrne & Shavelson, 1986; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985) and has been extensively tested and supported in non-western cultures even with translated versions in different languages (e.g., Abu et al., 1997; Chung & Watkins, 1992; Faria, 1997; Watkins et al., 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b; Watkins & Mpofu, 1994).

Studies in testing the multidimensionality of self-concept are voluminous and extensive. Nearly on all occasions, the multidimensionality has been supported (e.g., Byrne, 1984, 1988; Marsh, Barnes, & Hocevar, 1985; Marsh & O'Neil, 1984; Marsh, Parker, & Barnes, 1985; Marsh, Relich, & Smith, 1983; Marsh, Smith, & Barnes, 1983; Marsh &

Yeung, 1997) and substantiated across gender and age (Byrne & Gavin, 1996; Crain & Bracken, 1994; Marsh, 1987, 1994). Thus Marsh (1990b) calls for future research to facilitate a better understanding of academic self-concepts from a multidimensional perspective. Whereas most of the previous studies were predominantly conducted and supported with high school students in western cultures, the present study examines the multidimensionality of the English academic self-concept factor structure among a group of tertiary level second language (L2) learners in a non-western culture.

Linguistic theories related to the teaching of English have a long-standing history. Early linguistic theories were in favor of explicit teaching of each language skill in isolation. For example, grammar in writing and phonics in reading were taught separately. This part-to-whole approach to teaching was based on principles of behavioral psychology and scientific management developed almost a century ago and treated meaning as merely an end to be attained after words and syntax are identified. At one stage of the historical development, however, the fad was favorable to dichotomizing the teaching and learning of the language into two distinct approaches--the audiolingual approach that aimed to facilitate students' listening and speaking proficiency; and cognitive-coding theory that focused on students' ability in reading and writing the target language (Bolinger 1972; Lugton & Heinle 1971; Paulson & Bruder, 1975). In sharp contrast to these were theorists and researchers that connoted the dichotomy of the teaching and learning of the target language with respect to students' productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) proficiency (Asher 1979; Freeman 1975; Selinker & Tomlin 1986; Simensen 1990; Thonis 1970). Since the middle of the 1960s, the whole language approach (Goodman, 1979, 1989; Smith & Goodman 1973) has climaxed and has become very popular among linguists and teachers. This theory sees language as a whole entity and that listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the target language and emphasizes that they should be integrated when learned within a communicative and meaningful context. However, there is also emerging literature that has unveiled the many debatable issues underlying the approach in producing empirically desirable effects in classroom situations (Lier & Bufe, 1993; Nicholson 1992; Wheeler, 1995).

Despite a history that has rendered itself to seemingly conflicting theories and approaches, pedagogical and instructional materials in particularly English as an L2 have often concentrated on the teaching and training of the four language skills in their specificity in almost all levels and all modes of learning; from kindergarten to university; from

vocational to professional courses and from audio-visual materials to computer assisted language learning packages. In Hong Kong, as in many other places where English is learned as an L2, pedagogical and instructional materials for English have always concentrated on the teaching and training of four language skills--listening, speaking, reading and writing--separately at all levels and in all modes of learning. Furthermore, tests and exams have always been designed around these skills. It is therefore expected that for these learners of English as an L2, a global English self-concept is inferred from self-concepts relating to four distinct language skills divided into listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, it is also relevant to examine which of these skills may contribute more to the formation of a global English self-concept.

Method

Participants

321 students from one of the higher education institutions in Hong Kong participated in the survey. Students came from various disciplines of studies. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 28. Due to missing data in the returned questionnaires, only 306 (female = 168, male = 138) were used in the analysis.

Materials

The survey consisted of items adapted from Marsh's (1990b) Academic Self Description Questionnaire (ASDQ). Academic self-concept in each specific area was inferred from six items: "Compared to other students I'm good at ...", " I'm hopeless when it comes to ...", " I have always done well in ...", "Work in ... is easy for me", "I get good marks in ....", " I learn things quickly in ...." (1 = Definitely False to 8 = Definitely True). These items were strictly parallel across all five self-concept constructs considered here: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and a Global English self-concept construct.

Statistical Analysis

Responses to the survey items were scored so that higher scores reflected a higher self-concept. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted with item pair scores. Each construct was inferred from three item pairs formed by averaging the responses. Thus, using three items for each of five constructs, a 15 x 15 covariance matrix was constructed based on which subsequent CFA was conducted. The approach of CFA and the use of item pairs have been well documented elsewhere (e.g., Bollen, 1989; Byrne, 1989; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993; Marsh 1992a; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991) and is not further detailed here. The analyses

were conducted with the SPSS version of LISREL 7 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988). Two models were considered:

Model 1: Multidimensional English self-concepts. CFA was conducted to examine the structure of the multifacets of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing self-concepts of English. A multidimensional English self-concept structure requires the four constructs to be distinct, with substantial factor loadings of response items on respective a priori constructs, and correlations among these constructs substantial but distinctly different from 1.

Model 2: Relationship with a Global English self-concept construct. Model 2 examined the relationship between the skill-specific facets of English self-concept and the Global English self-concept construct. Support for a substantial relationship requires substantial path coefficients between the skill-specific and the Global constructs. The size of the path coefficients would also indicate the contribution of the self-concept in each skill domain to the formation of global English self-concept that is the focus of this study.

Goodness of fit

In evaluating the models, we examined the ability of each a priori model to fit the observed data and the theoretical predictions. The goodness of fit of the models in this study was evaluated based on suggestions of Marsh, Balla, and MacDonald (1988) and Marsh, Balla, and Hau (1996) with an emphasis on the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), but we present also the χ^2 test statistic and the relative noncentrality index (RNI). A TLI value greater than .9 is typically interpreted to mean that the model fit is adequate.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

In preliminary analyses, coefficient alpha estimates of reliability were determined for each scale considered in this study. The internal consistency of the Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Global English scales was good (alpha = .96, .95, .95, .95, and .95, respectively).

CFA Solutions

Both models presented here converged to proper solutions and had acceptable model fits. A summary of the goodness-of-fit indices and χ^2 statistics is shown in Table 1. Because parallel items were used across the four skills, there were likely to be correlations between items that were similar across constructs. For the model to fit the data, it would be necessary to include correlated uniquenesses for those items that are similar across the constructs. Thus

in the model, we included a total of 10 correlated uniquenesses when the Global English self-concept measure was also considered. The goodness of fit was substantially better than the model without correlated uniquenesses that is not reported here.

Model 1: Multidimensional English self-concepts. The first requirement for the test of multidimensionality is the formation of distinct factors with substantial factor loadings. The CFA solution showed that the factor loadings were substantial and statistically significant for all four skill-specific constructs (varying from .83 to .98, see Table 2). The second requirement is the distinctiveness of factors from each other such that the correlations between them should be significantly smaller than 1. An inspection of the correlations among the constructs found that the values ranged from .56 to .78 (see Table 2). These results showed that the students discriminated the four constructs well. Thus, results of Model 1 supported the multidimensionality of the four skill-specific facets of English self-concept. However, the large and significant correlations among the four constructs also seemed to suggest the possibility of a strong higher order factor inferred from the constructs.

Model 2: Relationship with a Global English self-concept construct. Model 2 related the Global English self-concept construct to the four skill-specific constructs. CFA showed that the path coefficients leading from the Global English factor to all the four skill-specific factors were high and statistically significant, the coefficients being .86, .77, .83 and .77 for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, respectively. The correlations among the four skill-specific self-concepts showed that the four skill-specific facets were distinct enough to be perceived as multidimensional whereas the large and significant paths showed that their relationships were close enough to be represented by a Global English self-concept construct (Figure 1). More importantly, the paths to the self-concepts of the receptive skills (.86 and .83 for listening and reading) were greater than the paths to the productive skills (.77 for both speaking and writing).

Discussion

This study examined the hierarchical and multidimensional nature of English self-concept. University students responded to survey items on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing self-concepts and Global English self-concept adapted from Marsh's (1990b, 1992d) Academic Self-Description Questionnaire (ASDQ). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found four distinct English skill-specific self-concept constructs, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of self-concepts in different skill areas but also that the self-concepts

of the four English skills can be represented by a single global English self-concept factor. Within a specific subject domain such as English, academic self-concept can be both hierarchical and multidimensional.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggested far-reaching implications to educators and counselors and in particular, classroom practitioners. That a single global English self-concept is adequate in representing the four distinct yet related self-concepts of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing has suggested the relevancy of a single global score in evaluating and assessing student English self-concept in a more general manner. Nevertheless, the multidimensionality of the English self-concept has also alerted language teachers that the four language skills can be effectively taught and learned as separate skills, at least perceived as such by the L2 learners. In terms of diagnostic intervention and feedback, the concentration on four separate skills seems to be superior to a single global English construct. The unfolding of the relationship between the global English self-concept the subsequent level of skill-specific self-concepts is an important pointer for teachers and others who are involved in the teaching of the language. Whether this can generalize to first language learners of English will need further verification with native speakers of the English language.

An important finding in the present study is that self-concepts of the receptive skills (Listening and Reading) are found to contribute more highly to the formation of the global English self-concept than their productive partners (Speaking and Writing). In the light of this finding, the L2 learners of English in the present study seem to identify and perceive themselves at the receiving end of the learning and teaching process. Whether this passivity of L2 learners is merely a result of ineffective skill instruction/practice in classrooms or a combination of classroom instruction and students' self-concepts of themselves as passive learners will require more research and investigation. If in fact the passivity of L2 learners is complicated by a psychological factor, future language learning initiatives may have to help students to hurdle this barrier besides the usual classroom instruction and practice. Again, caution must be taken to generalize the present finding to first language learners of English.

Still, more questions need to be addressed. Do L2 learners have different self-concepts from L1 learners? Is the passivity of the L2 learners a reasonable phenomenon or is it specific to the sample of Hong Kong who represented learners under colonial rule? Will this passivity

continue after the change of regime in Hong Kong? Further research is warranted to investigate this apparent passivity and its potential impact on L2 teaching and learning.

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Table 1. Summary of the Goodness-of-fit Indices

Model	$\chi 2$	df	RNI	TLI
1 Null	5225.70	66		
4 distinct factors	157.07	42	.978	.965
2 Null	6984.51	105		
1 Global factor explained by 4 skill factors	221.27	70	.978	.967

Note: N = 306. Model 1: The four factors were Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Table 2. CFA Solutions and Factor Correlations Between Constructs

	Factor Loadings	Factor Correlations			
		Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Listen	.66*-.98*	--			
Speak	.83*-.97*	.71*	--		
Read	.85*-.98*	.78*	.58*	--	
Write	.87*-.96*	.56*	.61*	.65*	--

Note: N = 306. The academic self-concepts were each inferred from 3 item pairs. Parameter estimates and correlations are standardized and range from 0 to 1. * $p < .05$

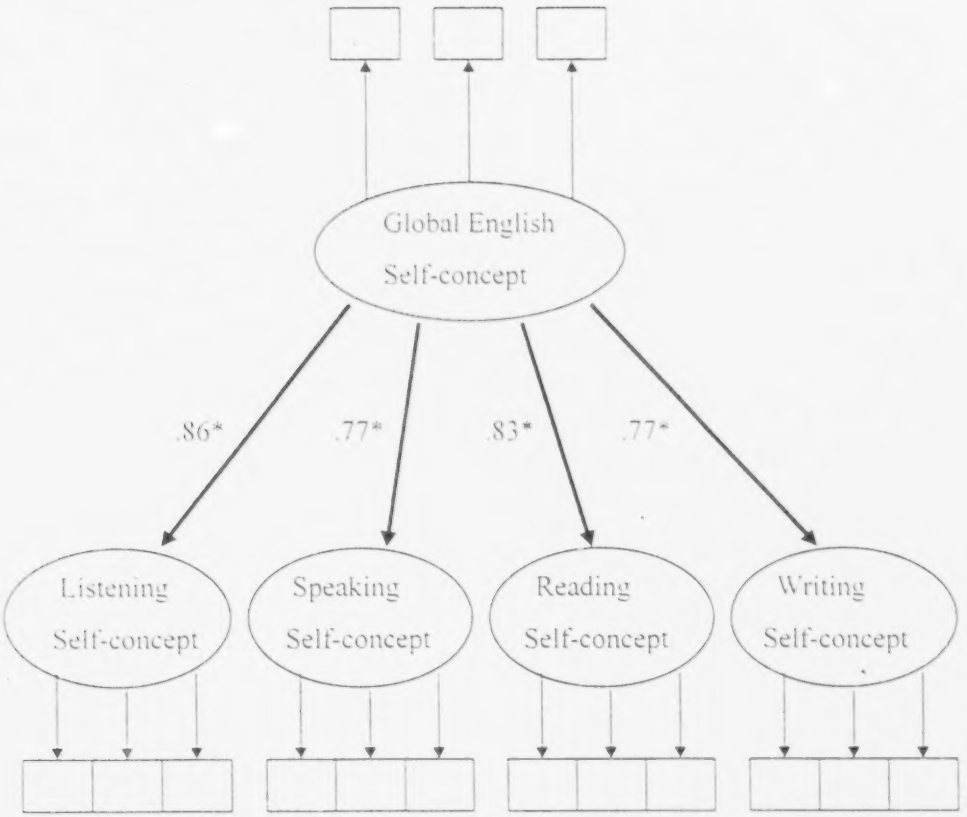

Figure 1. Structural path diagram of model 2--Four skill-specific factors explained by one Global English factor.

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